NEWS

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SPACE SHUTTLE STUDIES

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration is examining the advantages and disadvantages of a "phased approach" to the development of a reusable space shuttle system in which the orbiter vehicle would be developed first and initially tested with an interim expendable booster.

In a "phased approach", full scale hardware development of a reusable booster would be started later, but some design and preliminary development work for it would proceed concurrently with development and test of the orbiter.

For the interim booster NASA and its industrial contractors will study the use of a modified Saturn IC (first stage of the Saturn V that launches Apollo flights to the Moon), a booster based on the Titan III, and a booster system using solid rockets.

The contractor studies now nearing completion are confirming the feasibility and desirability of a reusable Space Shuttle as the key element of a space transportation system which will meet the continuing needs and long-term objectives of the United States in space.

"The preferred configuration which is emerging from these studies," NASA Administrator James C. Fletcher said today, "is a two-stage delta-wing reusable system in which the orbiter has external propellant tanks that can be jettisoned.

"Although our studies to date have mostly been based on a 'concurrent approach' in which development and testing of both the orbiter and the booster stages would proceed at the same time, we have been studying, in parallel, the idea of sequencing the development, test, and verification of critical new technology features of the system. We now believe that a 'phased approach' is feasible and may offer significant advantages.

"We believe that the additional studies we are now undertaking, together with those previously undertaken and now being completed, will put us in a position to make a decision this fall on the technical and programmatic approach to be followed in the Space Shuttle program."

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